Five Found Guilty in Plot To Assassinate Castro

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HARTFORD, Conn., Jan. 5 (UPI)—Five of eight men charged with supplying M-16 rifles for an unsuccessful April attempt to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro have been found guilty in U.S. District Court.

The men, members of "Alpha 66," an anti-Castro force that made the thwarted attempt, altered their pleas on federal gun violations from innocent to no contest Monday before Judge M. Joseph Blumenfeld.

Blumenfeld entered a finding of guilty in the cases against the men. The cases were begun when state police dredged 14 m-16 automatic rifles from the Connecticut River at Middletown in late 1969.

Other weapons, including several machine guns, were confiscated by the Navy in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, last April as the Alpha 66 commando group was repelled in a raid on the island.

The guns were stolen in pieces from Hartford's Colt Industries, which makes the M-16 for the U.S. Army, by an eight-man team and smuggled to Miami, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney F. Mack Buckley.

One of the men changing his plea, Enrique E. Rodriguez, 48, of Hartford, faces a maximum sentence of five years, a $5,000 fine or both for transporting firearms he stole while employed by Colt.

Rodriguez, involved in preparations for the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961, was described by his attorney as a "misguided patriot." The attorney said Rodriguez dealt in the guns after being told stories of a Communist conspiracy in Cuba.

The four others face maximum prison sentences of 2½ years, $2,500 in fines each, or both as accessories in the gunrunning.

They are Raul la Rosa, 40, of Hoboken, N.J., Sylverio Rodriguez, 34, of Weehawken, N.J., Ernesto Rodriguez, 50, described as formerly of the New York-New Jersey area, and Andres Nazario Sargen, 54, of Miami.

Sargen was described as "the leader" of the operation by Buckley who indicated he would seek dismissal of charges against three other members of the conspiracy.

The three were Henry Rodriguez, 23, of Hartford, Juan Espinosa, 34, of Miami, and Vincente Mendez, believed captured or killed in the aborted invasion.